

OPUNTIA 428



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FOR THEM THAT HAS READ A BOOK
photos by Dale Speirs

[See OPUNTIA #327 for an earlier article on the new library showing a giant Lego model.]

The big news in Cowtown recently was the opening of the new Central Branch of the Calgary Public Library. The \$245 million edifice officially opened on November 1, one block from the old building. It straddles the Deep South LRT line and is adjacent to the City Hall stations, which serve commuters on all four legs of the system. A dozen bus routes pass within a block of it.

There are branch libraries throughout the city, but the Central Library is where the main collections are kept, such as the local history and non-circulating references. It is the most convenient branch for me and is where I do my research or read all those cozy novels that I review.

At upper right is a view of the old building I took in January 2015. It was a legacy of the 1960s, designed in the classic concrete fortress style favoured by bureaucrats of that decade. I photographed the new building as it was constructed. Groundbreaking was in 2014 (below right), and herewith is a series of photos I took with my smartphone camera.

The trains kept running throughout construction. The first part of construction was to enclose the tracks in a concrete shell, after which the rest of the building went up. During the great flood of June 2013, the old library was flooded a meter deep on the ground floor, as indeed the tracks and City Hall across the street were, so everything in the new building is above the high water mark.

Views look at the northwest side of the new building unless otherwise stated.



The concrete shell over the tracks.



2016-09-18



2016-10-30



Below and bottom: The northeast side of the building.



Bottom: The east side a few days before the grand opening. The old buildings are historic sites from pioneer days, the few survivors left.



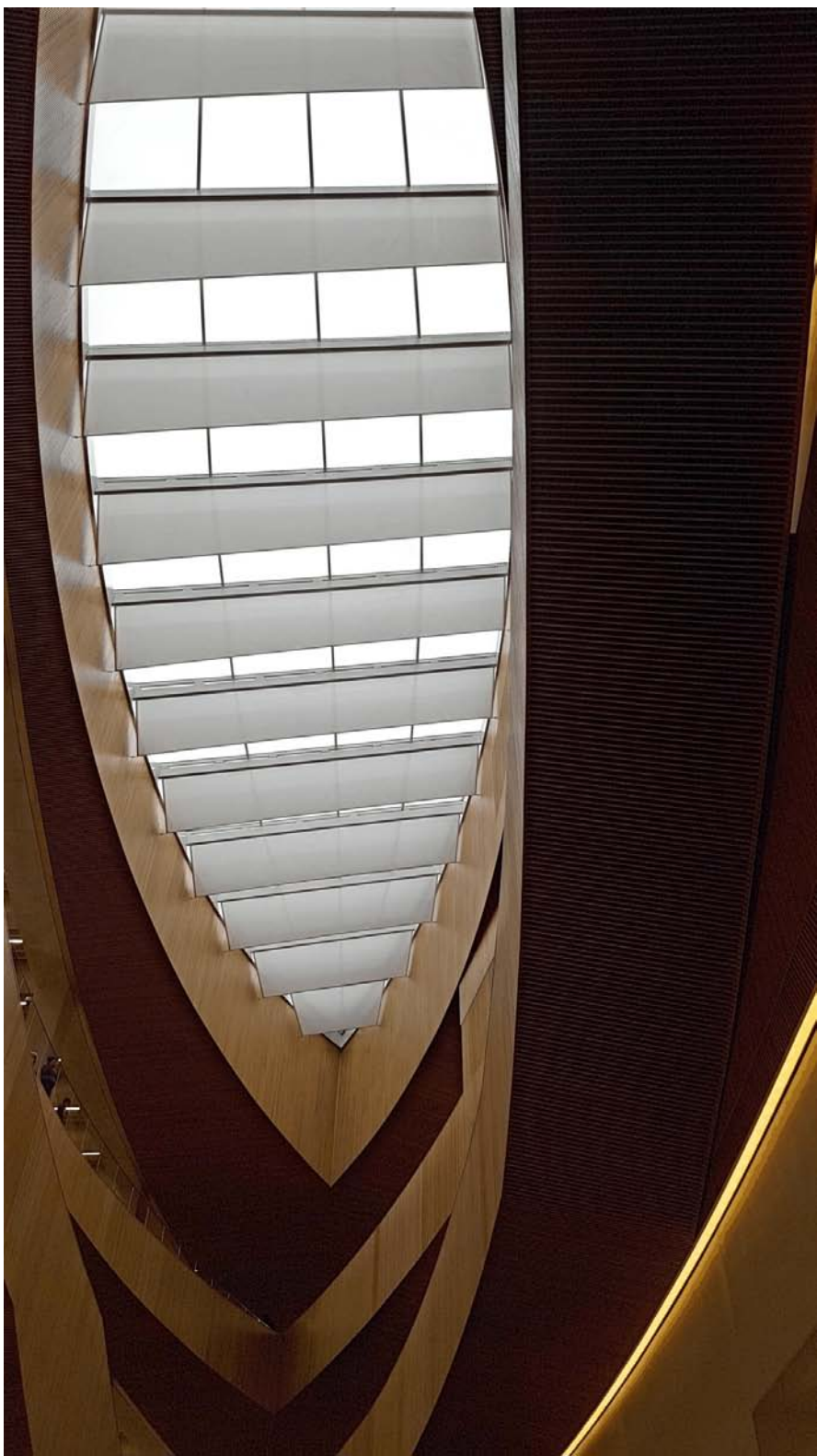


The big day, Thursday, November 1st. The new library covers two city blocks, stretching along the east side of 3 Street SE from 7 Avenue to 9 Avenue.

During the construction, I wasn't able to photograph the entrance at the south end of the building because it was blocked by hoarding and scaffolding. But here it is.

Genuine hardwood throughout the building, as you will see in the next few pages. No wonder it cost \$245 million.





Far left: Inside the front door, looking up at the skylight. Look at all that hardwood parquet.

A less over-exposed photo showing the shutters hanging underneath the skylight that presumably will make the light more diffuse. We shall see next summer.

Below: The CPL has had self-serve automated checkouts for several years. All the books have RFID tags. These checkouts were brought over from the old building.

When books are returned at any branch, they are dumped into a conveyor belt system which reads the RFID tag in each book and automatically sorts them into appropriate bins. The stackers then take the bins for re-shelving the books.

At right: What is new at the Central Library is an enclosed conveyor belt system that carries returned books up to the appropriate floor for binning.



This was on display in the History section of the library. Tell that to kids these days and they don't believe you. To be honest, I don't miss card catalogues.

The last sentence on the exhibit label contains an in-joke that only an old-time Calgarian would understand. In 1975, Calgary's centennial year, there was a big contest for an official municipal anthem. It was performed a few times and has since been forgotten. Very few Cowtowners today know that we ever had an anthem.

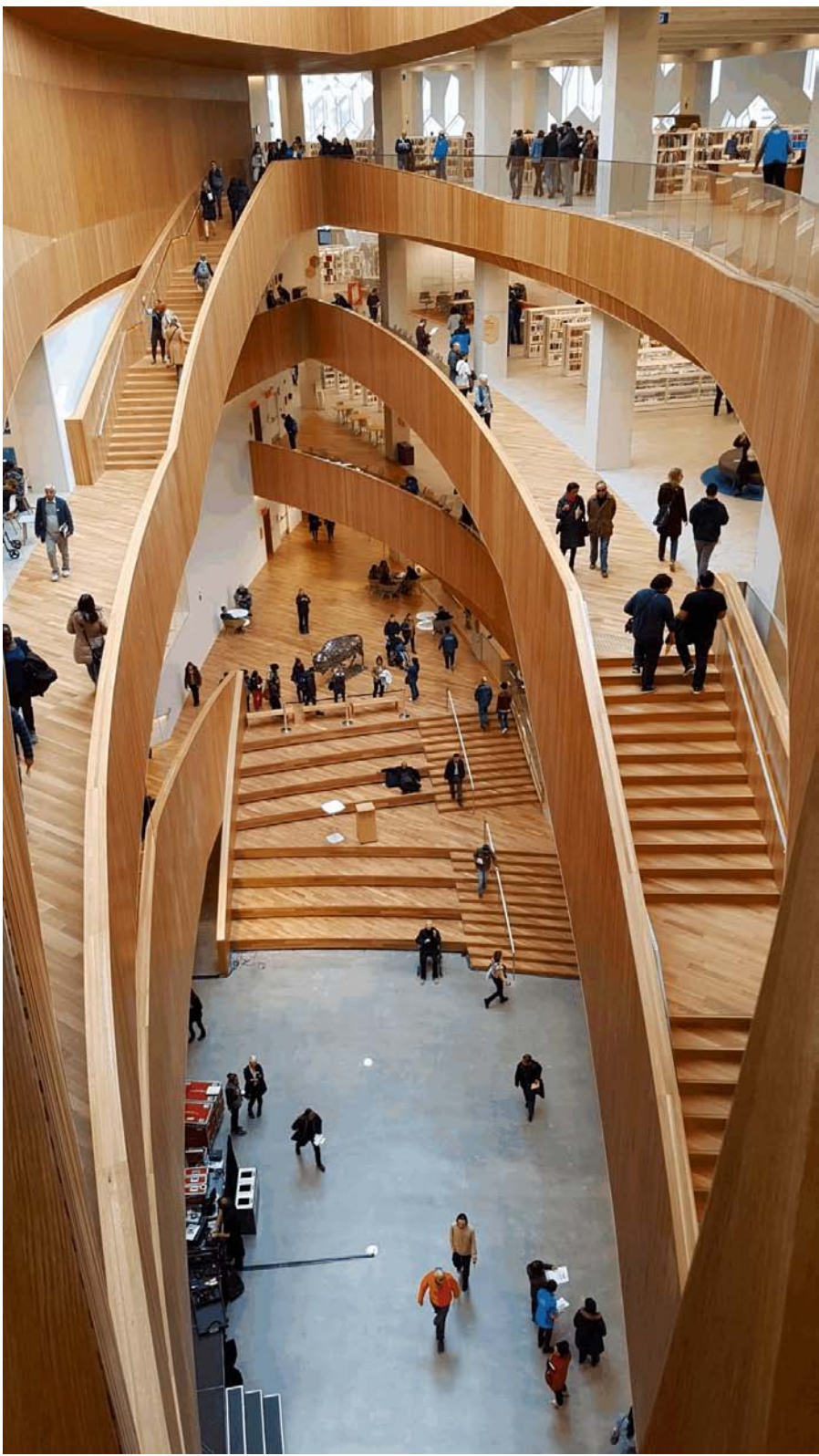


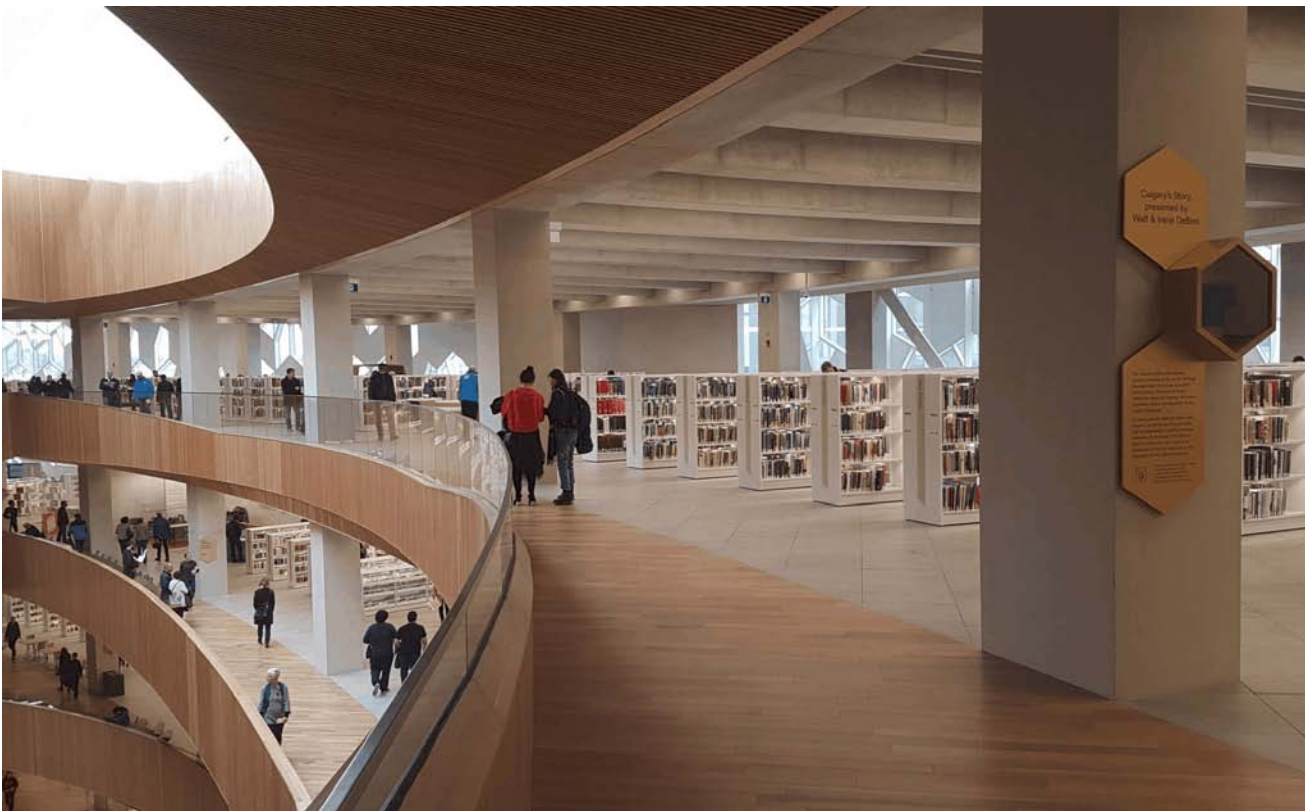
Card Catalogue

In the days before the internet, the card catalogue was how libraries kept track of what books were in the collection and provided access to those items. Libraries actually kept several different card catalogues. One was a "shelf list" that just listed all the books in Dewey Decimal order, another catalogue would list books by author and/or title, a further one would list the books by subject. Sometimes each of these would be kept in one catalogue, sometimes they would be all in one. There was no way to know if a book was signed out or on the shelf.

The cards were prepared by the cataloguing department and staff was assigned to file the cards. The cards had holes in the bottom to hold them in place – just in case a drawer dropped, you wouldn't have to refile all of the cards.

The card catalogue also has a Local History Index which was originally known as a "Where to Look" file. In pre-Google times, it was the search engine that library staff used to questions with hard to find answers on local topics. For example, if you look under "Calgary-Songs and Music" there is a reference to the Words of the Calgary Song in the magazine Canada West, Summer 1979 p. 28 which to this day, you won't find on the internet.

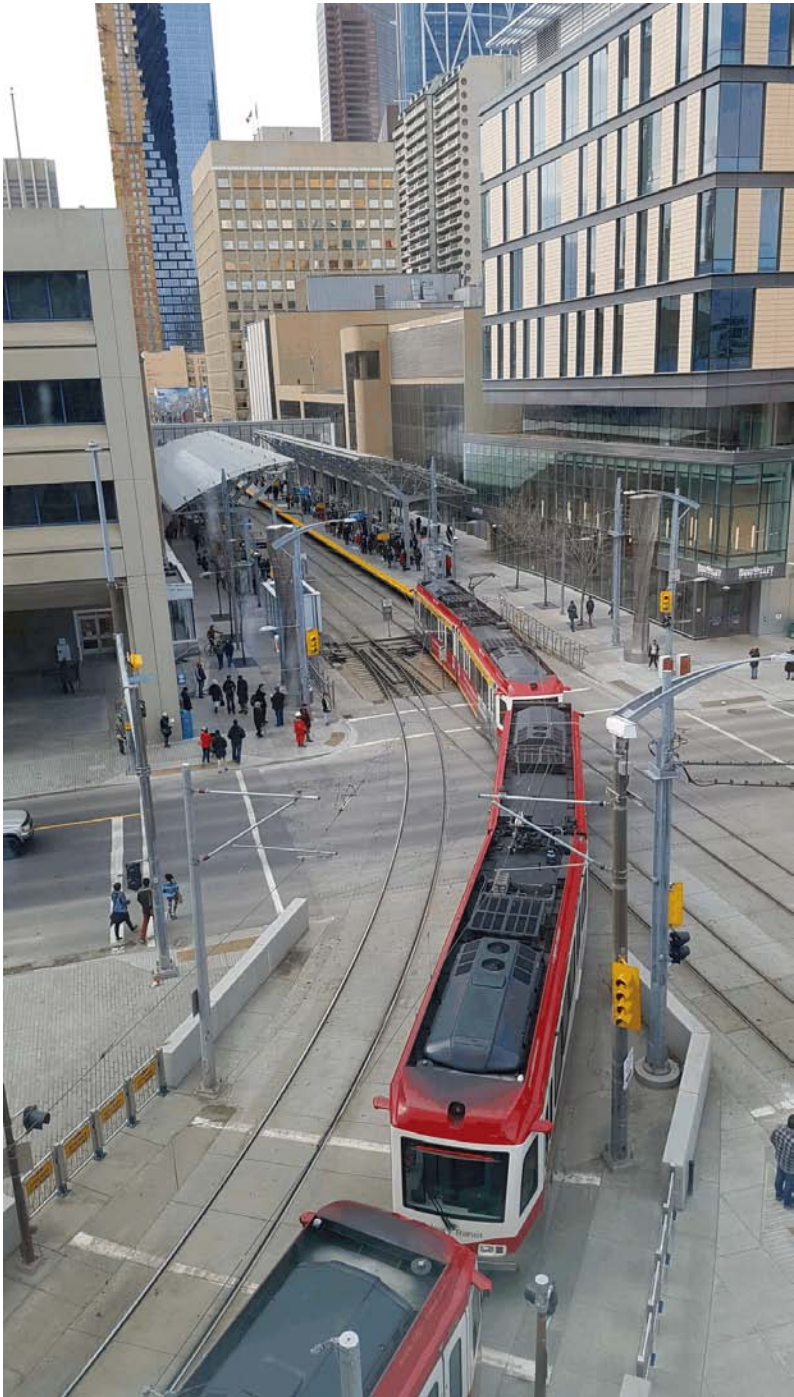




Calgary is on Treaty 7 land, which includes three tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Piikani, Kainai), Tsuu T'ina (Dene), and Nakoda (Sioux). The southwest border of Calgary is contiguous with the Tsuu T'ina Reserve.



Below: Looking down at an LRT train emerging from underneath the library and turning west into the City Hall platforms. At the far end of the platforms is a low-rise building with a white wall; that is the old library. It will eventually be torn down, having been deemed too expensive to bring up to code.



Below: Looking down from the south end above the library entrance at a scenic view of the railway yards. On the far side of the tracks is the Victoria Park district.



The grand opening was on a weekday. This is what it was like when I walked past it on the following Saturday, when most Calgarians had the day off. I hate to think what it was like inside the building.



In order to transfer the collections, the old library was closed for three weeks prior to the new one opening. During that time I used the Fish Creek Library in the deep south of Calgary. Although other branch libraries were closer, they were awkward to get to by car or bus, whereas the Fish Creek Library is an easy walk from the Anderson LRT station.

Other branch libraries in Calgary are standard brick boxes of no architectural merit. The Fish Creek branch was designed during a brief burst of enlightenment, and was completed in 1985.



LITERA SCRIPTA MORTEM: PART 2

by Dale Speirs

[Part 1 appeared in OPUNTIA #424.]

If You Can't Trust A Literary Agent, Who Can You Trust?

BURIED IN A BOOK (2012) is the first novel in a cozy series by Lucy Arlington, pseudonym of Susan Furlong, and/or Jennifer Stanley aka Ellery Adams and Sylvia May. It's complicated. As near as I could figure from Googling, this is a franchise whose authors changed in mid-stream.

The protagonist is Lila Wilkins of Inspiration Valley, North Carolina. She lost her newspaper job in the big city, and had an uncontrollable teenaged son named Trey, who was a good kid at heart but was drifting into a rough life.

Wilkins got a new job with the Novel Idea Literary Agency as a slush pile reader, the only ones who would hire her. Like all Miss Marples and Jessica Fletchers in cozy series, Wilkins' arrival in the village meant a hike in the murder rate.

She got off to a flying start at work where, on her first day at the job, she found the body of an aspiring author, Marlette Robbins, in the waiting room. Someone stabbed him with a syringe full of bee venom. As icing on the cake, Trey wrecked her car while stunting on a school football field with his drunken friends.

Wilkins diverts energy into snooping around Robbins's property and into his life, using the standard Miss Marple techniques such as unlawful entry and contaminating evidence. She suspects one of her co-workers who absolved herself by becoming the second victim.

That forced her onto a different track. From there, she had reason to believe that a successful novelist the agency represented had stolen a manuscript by Robbins and published it under his name. Her surmise was correct, and the rest of the novel was a matter of to- and fro-ing for evidence.

A fair to middling start to this cozy series. Life at the agency seemed slightly off the way it was written, especially locating it in a hick village. At least it isn't a typewriter repair shop in a ski resort as in a different cozy series.

OFF THE BOOKS (2016) has Lila Wilkins planning the Agency's part in a bridal expo. Not only did the NILA have a line of bridal books to publicize, but Wilkins was planning her own nuptials. The Agency brought in some of its authors for the event, many of whom think they're rock stars.

The hotel was being renovated during the expo, a tradition that many science fiction fans can relate to. One of the tradesmen, Chuck Richards, got a nail driven into his skull. Wilkins was openly referred to as a murder magnet by her co-workers and friends, and for good reason, as she found Richards' body.

Just for fun, one of the authors at the expo was his ex-wife Lynn Werner. They did not get along. Werner's cozy novel used characterization that suggested she wasn't writing entirely fiction. Another author, Jodi Lee, had just published a novel using a murder M.O. exactly the same as that used on Richards. Not surprising, given the similarity in cozy plots.

Wilkins' fiancé was Detective Sean Griffiths. The reader will wonder why Griffiths didn't recuse himself from the case, given that Wilkins was so heavily involved. The police arrested Lee because someone planted a strip of nails in her room, and that was good enough for them. We know she's innocent, of course.

The Agency held an emergency meeting of its staff. Half of it was to discuss the murder magnet in their midst, and the other half about more important matters, such as their event at the expo, a book signing called Booked For A Wedding.

The real killer was a woman who didn't like Richards fooling around with her daughter. Wilkins discovered her and barely survived the final confrontation. Wilkins then had to face the worst terror of all, modeling bridesmaid gowns at the expo.

Book Collectors.

NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE began in print in 1886 and was broadcast on old-time radio from 1943 to 1955. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from www.otrlibrary.org.) Carter seldom bothered to trouble the police, and investigated murders and crimes himself without the fuss and bother of uniforms hanging about.

Carter's assistant and girlfriend was Patsy Bowen, who mostly screamed at dead bodies, got herself kidnapped or taken hostage, and listened to Carter explain the plot.

"Shakespeare's Ghost" is a 1945 episode written by Stanley Kaufman. A book collector named J.C. Reed hired Carter to recover a stolen First Folio signed by Ben Jonson. He told Carter of a legend that the Folio had been stolen three times in the past three centuries. Each time, the ghost of Shakespeare came back and decapitated the thief.

Having set up that piece of blatant foreboding, the listener is not surprised when Carter, Bowen, and Reed discovered the body of the thief in his hotel room, decapitated by a 16th-Century claymore left lying in the next room. After they finished examining the sword, they returned to the main room and found the corpse missing.

Carter did some laboratory testing on what clues they had garnered. He and Bowen headed out to Reed's mansion. The butler was suspicious as all get out, but it wasn't only him. Reed had neglected to mention to Carter that he collected 16th-Century weapons. The episode climaxed in the basement of the mansion, where Carter escaped death in a ridiculous manner.

It was all a fraud. Reed was in it for the insurance money, having insured the tomes far over market value. He needed Carter to confirm the theft to the police and insurance company. The disappearing corpse had been stolen from a morgue. Needless to say, Reed did not collect the claim.

"The Priceless Prose" was a 1947 episode that began with Carter and Bowen reading the news of a robbery at the Bancroft mansion. Two old dears, sisters Julia and Victoria, were the great-granddaughters of Joshua Bancroft, apparently a great novelist, of whom no one in the radio listening audience ever heard.

Besides passing on the family trust fund, he also left an unpublished manuscript which his descendants kept in a safe. The manuscript was the MacGuffin, said to be worth \$73,000 according to an appraisal. It was stolen one night, during which Victoria was murdered and Julia badly beaten.

While Carter and Bowen digest that news, he got a telephone call from an old friend, book dealer Arthur Haskell, who wanted to meet him urgently. Bowen suggested the call couldn't be a coincidence. Off they went to the bookstore.

As Haskell was about to tell them something, shots are fired through a window, silencing him forever.

From there, the scene jumped to the Bancroft mansion. One hopes that Carter and Bowen called the police before leaving the bookstore, but nothing further was said. They talked to Julia and her ne'er-do-well brother Taylor, who suggested the name of Prof. Carlton Van Leiden. They visited him and found the manuscript on his library bookshelf. He had a song-and-dance routine that explained why and how he had the manuscript.

Van Leiden gave them another name, book collector Arnold Gibson whose day job was a stock broker. Bowen took the manuscript back to their office, while Carter returned to Bancroft Hall.

More excursions and excitement followed. They visited Gibson, who told them he had the manuscript appraised because Taylor owed him \$55,000 on stock market losses and failed to make a margin call.**

Clues are scattered about like rock salt on an icy road. Gibson died not long after. Carter and Bowen trotted back to Bancroft Hall, where they accused Taylor of murdering Haskell and Gibson, and Julia of murdering her sister Victoria. Shots were fired, but with a single bound and all that, Carter overpowered the culprits.

The denouement was a lengthy explanation by Carter to Bowen about who did what to whom. It was the end of the line for the Bancroft family. Nothing about what would happen to the manuscript in the future. The plot was a standard MacGuffin chase, and the script could just as easily used jewels, a last will and testament, or property deeds as the thing desired.

** Stocks can be bought on margin. For example, \$100 cash will get you \$1,000 worth of shares, subject to sufficient collateral and trust by your broker. If the stock price falls, you are instantly liable for the debt, and your property or income can be seized to make up the deficit. The \$900 debt is the margin call.

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF NERO WOLFE WAS an old-time radio series which ran from 1943 to 1951. The episodes were all pastiches written by other writers. Rex Stout collected royalty cheques but had no part in the series.

Nero Wolfe, a mountain of a man, was a private detective loath to leave the security of his brownstone, preferring to tend his orchids in a rooftop greenhouse of his Manhattan brownstone, eat gourmet meals prepared by his chef, and read books. The practical work of investigating his cases was done by his secretary Archie Goodwin.

The original stories and novels by Rex Stout (died 1975) are referred to as the corpus, and stories by other authors as pastiches. Murder was often done during the cases or is the cause of the investigation. The duo are therefore well acquainted with the local NYPD Homicide Squad, headed by Inspector Cramer. The NCO was Sergeant Purley, and the 2-in-C was Lieutenant Rowcliff.

“Stamped For Murder” was a 1950 episode written by Louis Vittes. It opened with Goodwin riding in a taxicab driven by a character known as Minus. The seat springs had broken, so Minus stopped at a bookstore and bought the thickest book he could find to sit on.

It transpired that the book had a dummy cover and inside it was a First Folio of Shakespeare. This led to assorted gunplay incidents, a femme fatale who clerked at the bookstore and had a guilty conscience, and a book collector who was in on it with her as part of a phony insurance claim. People got greedy and people got dead.

Wolfe set a trap in his office, taking out the First Folio and putting it in a safe place. He substituted Goodwin’s prized collection of ESQUIRE magazines (ask your grandfather) under the dummy covers. The bait was taken, and so were the two fraud artists. One will go up the river for a long term, and the other will go up the river for a brief sit in the electric chair.

Lots of twists and turns in the plot, and just as many Shakespeare quotes. One suspects that Vittes had a volume of the King Henry plays next to his typewriter as he wrote this script.

Those Who Can Read A Book.

COVER STORY (2013) by Erika Chase is the third installment in a cozy series, the first two volumes of which I reviewed in OPUNTIA #424 (page 12). It is about the Ashton Corners Mystery Readers and Cheese Straws Society of Alabama, as motley a gang of Miss Marples as ever afflicted any village.

Club member Molly Mathews introduced Teeney Coldicutt, who had moved to the big city decades ago and now returned as an elderly widow. Coldicutt had just published a romance novel. Since Ashton Corners had no bookstore, she was using the club for a book signing launch.

It was not the quiet tea party that most book signings are in more sedate places such as Manhattan or the south side of Chicago. Mathews was assaulted and all her copies of the book stolen.

Then the publisher Orwell Rivers was murdered. The police latched on to another club member as the culprit, and began collecting evidence to fit the suspect. Lizzy Turner was the head Marple of the club, so off she went.

The book launch planning staggered on. While getting replacement copies from the publisher’s warehouse, Turner and Coldicutt stumbled across boxes of counterfeit currency. That’s one way for a publisher to stay in the black.

The discovery brought in the feds. Coldicutt was the next assault victim, the result of which revealed that her deceased husband had been a money launderer and counterfeit in partnership with Rivers.

The ending was not impressive. The killer came out of nowhere, a last-chapter revelation that was a cheat. Surprise endings are not a sin in themselves, but readers should have a fair chance to succeed at guessing whodunit. Coldicutt did get her book launched though. Soon to be remaindered in bookstores everywhere.

THE GROVES OF ACADEMIA: PART 5

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 4 appeared in OPUNTIA's #67.1F, 262, 358, and 372.]

Murder On Campus: Old-Time Radio.

“Diploma Of Death”, written by Gilbert and Ruth Braun, was a 1945 episode of the old-time radio series THE AVENGER. (This and hundreds of other OTR shows are available as free mp3s at www.otrlibrary.org) This remarkable series was a sound-alike version of THE SHADOW, created and written by some of the same people as the other show. The Avenger was in reality Jim Brandon, who could cloud men’s minds with chemical gas. His girlfriend Fern Collier was the only one who knew his secret.

In the episode at hand, a college track meet turned deadly when a sniper shot a sprinter on the track. The deceased was competing with two others to uncover a major chemical discovery made by one of their professors, who had died without revealing his secret. He did, however, leave coded messages in some rare books in the library. An additional motive was that the three researchers were all competing for the vacant professorship.

The most obvious suspect, as per standard mystery practice, became the second victim. The police inspector relied totally on Brandon to investigate the case, and followed him around like a puppy. The murderer was discovered using information not revealed to the listener until the epilogue. Another professor did it, also seeking the coded chemical discovery.

The story was fast moving, mainly so the listener didn’t have time to dwell on the plot holes and spaghetti logic that Brandon used to solve the case. Nonetheless the show is an interesting listen. It told a story briskly and directly to the point, something to which many modern fiction writers should pay attention.

LET GEORGE DO IT was an OTR mystery series that ran from 1946 to 1954. George Valentine was a private detective who ran an ad in the classifieds which he recited at the beginning of each episode: *Personal notice: Danger’s my stock in trade. If the job’s too tough for you to handle, you’ve got a job for me. Write full details.* Valentine’s secretary and girlfriend was Claire Brooks, whom everyone called Brooksie.

“Chair Of Humanities”, written by David Victor and Jackson Gillis, was a 1950 episode of the series. The narrative is as incoherent as most of the characters in this episode, and the plot is difficult to summarize. Valentine was called into the case by the wife of Professor Cable, who then denied it when he arrived on campus.

The professor was a sharp-practice man who specialized in practical psychology, that is to say, manipulating weak-willed people into doing what he wanted. One of them was his sister-in-law Jessie, who lived with them on campus as a servant.

Someone among the wimpy crowd had worked up enough nerve to begin poisoning his food and drink, but his paranoia was such that he didn’t consume anything he didn’t prepare himself. The police tested the poisoned drinks and determine that the poison came from somewhere on campus, probably the science or medical labs. Unfortunately, inventory controls were sloppy and anyone could have stolen the poison.

After much investigating and too many clues, the plot, such as it is, moved to a conclusion when Jessie was found shot dead. Valentine determined that it wasn’t murder, it was suicide. She had been psychologically tormented and pushed over the edge by Professor Cable.

Valentine established that Jessie had been poisoning Cable’s booze supply. Once it was over, Cable replaced his liquors and soda water from fresh, unpoisoned bottles. He took a drink to celebrate, with ice as usual. Jessie killed him from beyond the grave, for she had also poisoned the ice cubes. There is now a vacancy for the position of Chair of Humanities.

Murder On Campus: Cozy Novels.

STRANGLED PROSE (1986) by the late Joan Hess (died 2017) was the first novel in a cozy mystery series about Claire Malloy, bookstore owner and frequent amateur sleuth.

This installment is about the unfortunate Mildred Twiller, aka Azalea Twilight, author of the romance novel PROFESSOR OF PASSION. Twiller used a pseudonym because she worked at Faber College. She knew it wouldn’t take long for readers there to figure out that the book was as much a roman-a-clef as it was a novel.

That also explained why she was strangled in her house shortly after publication. It may not have been an offended faculty member either, as the Farber Women's Organization, always on the lookout for something to be indignant about, objected to Malloy selling trash like Twiller's book.

Twiller's husband Douglas was next to depart our vale of tears, strangled in the same manner. It was revealed that he was Mildred's ghostwriter and that she never read her own books. He was on staff at the college, and used his fellow professors' peccadilloes as the basis for the novel. Trouble was, he didn't disguise them that much, so the book could be construed as libel.

The police followed standard procedure. They picked a suspect, in this case Malloy, and gathered evidence to fit her. Anything that could be twisted to blame her was, while anything that pointed elsewhere was ignored. That would never happen in the real world, of course.

The denouement was standard. Malloy was held at gunpoint by the real murderer, during which all the motivations and plot twists were aired out. Douglas was a ladies' man, and the killer wanted revenge. She also had a grudge against most, if not all, of the faculty for reasons best known to her. It took a while to explain all the back history. An average read, judged as a cozy.

A QUICHE BEFORE DYING (1993) by Jill Churchill (pseudonym of Janice Young Brooks) begins with protagonist Jane Jeffry, bored suburban Chicago housewife, enrolling in a writing course just to keep busy. The course was about how to write family history and autobiography. One of the classmates was horrid old biddy Agnes Pryce, who didn't get any older after eating some food at the class.

Poison, it was, and while the police were doing their thing, so was Jeffry. Pryce had lots of enemies because of her vicious gossip and worse deeds. In the class, students took turns reading aloud their completed chapters of autobiography. Early on, the reader of this novel will realize that when Pryce bragged about an incident decades ago that later caused the death of a young mother, Pryce had signed her death warrant. It then became a matter of identifying who the now grown children of that mother were, or now are as adults attending the course.

The readings by the class members, and Pryce's inappropriate remarks, provided other motives, but they paled next to Pryce's revelation. The writing class had the two daughters of the woman she killed in it. Some of those essays proved

the pen may be mightier than the sword but not the poison vial. A good read for a cozy.

The community college apparently didn't keep exhaustive files on its past students, for Jane Jeffry returned a decade later in A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S SCREAM (2014). She became involved in amateur dramatics at the college. The script was written by the director, a professor with no professional acting experience but who nonetheless thought he knew how plays should be done. His opus was a disaster, what with student actors and two professional actors who are in the decline-and-fall part of their careers.

The dramatics backstage were better than what was being performed in front of the curtain. Feuds from days of yore, egos clashing, and power struggles that dwarf anything in the international political arena. Much like being on a science fiction convention committee, except for the murders. A young actor who made a specialty of being obnoxious exited the stage permanently after someone explained good behaviour to him with a blunt instrument.

The play was a failure, so Jeffry took her mind off it by sleuthing. The police were on the job too, don't forget. The killer's motive had nothing to do with all the current backstage drama, but a lot to do with events decades ago. The epilogue was a where-are-they-now? checklist of all the characters great and small, and where they wound up after the trial. The main part of the novel wasn't bad but it had a weak ending.

MURDER 101 by Maggie Barbieri is a 2006 novel that was the first in a cozy mystery series about Alison Bergeron. She is a professor of English literature at Saint Thomas College, on the banks of the Hudson River in Bronx, New York. Life had been rough for her recently, with a divorce and then her car stolen.

The NYPD found her car, but there was a corpse in the trunk, a student from her Shakespeare class. The deceased co-ed had a drug dealer boyfriend, and her family were connected to the Mafia. Bergeron's ex-husband Ray was also a suspect. He had a wandering eye during their marriage and was now chasing after co-eds.

Bergeron was worried the police thought she was the murderer. She and her friend Max (Maxine) Rayfield began their own sleuthing. Bergeron was a physical klutz, taking assorted falls and embarrassing herself in a myriad of

ways. The president of the college wanted Bergeron suspended until the murder was solved, but the nuns who operated the place interceded.

The J'accuse meeting in Bergeron's office on campus was a barnburner. The culprit was another co-ed, with several layers of jealousy involved. During the meeting she grabbed a pair of scissors from Bergeron's desk, stabbed a man in the chest, and then got his gun. Careless of him. The excitement and contretemps that followed can easily be imagined. Afterwards it only remained for the police and paramedics to mop up, and not just figuratively, given all the blood sprayed about.

The novel read well for a cozy, although Bergeron was portrayed too much as a wimp, given to frequent crying jags and fainting spells.

FINAL EXAM (2009) is a later installment in this series. Wayne Brookwell, the resident director at the Siena Hall dormitory, cleaned out his rooms and scampered. Only five weeks were left in the semester, so there isn't time to post the job vacancy.

Bergeron was ordered to fill in, but babysitting a horde of college students was not something for which she would volunteer. President Etheridge volunteered her. Since she didn't have tenure, but did have a trail of corpses behind her, she couldn't refuse.

A resident director has to reside, and Bergeron reluctantly moved into Brookwell's suite on campus. The toilet was plugged, with plastic bags of heroin as it turned out, which brought in the NYPD. Etheridge wanted to keep Brookwell's absence low key, but he was not going to succeed.

Bergeron thought she saw Brookwell near the campus. An unknown goon was looking for him, so it seemed he wasn't murdered or skipped to Mexico. As Bergeron went around campus stirring up trouble like a carp stirs up the muddy bottom of a pond, all sorts of clues emerged. She was a walking disaster. If anything could be knocked over, stolen, broken, or vomited on, she did it.

Eventually Brookwell was tracked down and brought into custody as a drug dealer. Besides supplying campus students, he was a mule for big-time dealers. Surprisingly, no one was murdered. All the bad guys were rounded up in the epilogue. Bergeron resolved some of the personal messes she made. The campus settled back into complacency, at least until the next novel.

POISON IVY (2013) by Cynthia Riggs is part of a cozy mystery series about Victoria Trumbull, a Miss Marple who, at the age of 92, had just become adjunct professor of poetry at Ivy Green College. The locale is West Tisbury, Massachusetts, on the island of Martha's Vineyard.

The college had just been established, and consisted of a pair of mansions and a two-car garage converted into a lecture hall. Matters were shaky for the college's accreditation to begin with, and were not helped by the discovery of a body in a crawl space of the garage/lecture hall on the first day of classes.

The deceased was a professor at Cape Cod University. He was on the oversight committee responsible for IGC's accreditation. The committee had to fill the vacant position he left behind while squabbling about tenure for other of its members, not entirely unrelated. Lots of vicious academic politics interfered, some of which stretched back decades as personal jealousies.

No sooner was the background on the tenure politics filled in than the second body was found in the shrubbery of the IGC campus. Then human bones were uncovered by a dog digging in the turf. Because the forensics team was from the mainland, they enquired about rental accommodation to save money and time instead of constantly taking the ferry.

As the death toll rose, and the IGC teetered on the edge of oblivion, Trumbull taught a bit of poetry in between sleuthing. Since the lecture hall was still a crime scene, her class met on the lawn under the spreading trees. Unfortunately that was the part where the dog found the bones, so they had to keep moving.

There were other distractions, such as a university professor taking credit for her graduate students' work. The resolution came just before both the college and university ran out of faculty members. The murderer was brought down the hard way, and public order was restored. The good news was that there will be many vacancies for ambitious young professors. The book did well in describing the shady side of academic life.

Murder Off Campus: Novels.

THE GODWOLF MANUSCRIPT (1973) by Robert B. Parker was the first novel in a series about a Boston private detective named Spenser, no first name ever given. He had been called in by university administrators to locate a stolen 14th Century illuminated manuscript, taken from a university museum. The

book began with one of the funniest opening lines I've read: *The office of the university president looked like the front parlor of a successful Victorian whorehouse.*

The president told Spenser that the university had received a ransom demand of \$100,000 for the return of the manuscript. (Add a zero to allow for inflation of modern currency.) They suspected the Student Committee Against Capitalist Exploitation. The university had budget shortfalls and didn't have the money. The other concern was that the manuscript will physically deteriorate the longer it was kept away from its climate-controlled display case.

Spenser's initial investigation into SCACE generated much hostility from the students. His first suspect was shot dead at the beginning of Chapter 3. Events became uglier after that, and the body count rose. Spenser did not get along well with the Boston police, nor the university administrators, nor Joseph Broz, the crime boss who inserted himself into the plot halfway through the novel.

The grand finale doubled the total death toll. The SCACE radicals had been using drugs to deviate students away from a clean lifestyle, the drugs wholesaled to them by Broz. One of the radicals went too far in stealing the manuscript, so Broz forced its return. The survivors will do hard time.

Lots of quips and snappy dialogue from Spenser, to the point where both police and mobsters tell him to shut the **** up. Spenser had a cross to bear, as people keep spelling his name with a 'c'. A funny read that is gory at times but kept the reader turning the pages.

KILLER ON A HOT TIN ROOF (2010) by Livia J. Washburn is part of a cozy series about Delilah Dickinson, whose travel agency specialized in literary tours. This time around, she led a group of English literature professors to the Tennessee Williams Literary Festival in New Orleans. The group was every bit as dysfunctional as Blanche DuBois, but unfortunately Dickinson could not rely on the kindness of strangers.

One of the professors claimed that Williams didn't write the CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF play. He said it was authored by Howard Burleson, one of Williams's lovers, and produced the elderly man himself.

Burleson was brought along with the group, and was to unveil the original manuscript of the play in his handwriting. Someone else feared that the play was

based on his own family and didn't want a scandal, even after all these years. Another professor denounced Burleson as a faker. The entire group was bitchier than any character Williams created. Dickinson had her hands full trying to keep the peace among the group. She didn't succeed. Burleson was murdered.

There were plenty of suspects for the NOPD and Dickinson to investigate. The academic jealousies alone provided a plethora of motives. The police arrested the wrong person, as per usual in cozies. Dickinson took it upon herself to find the real murderer. She did it the hard way, and barely survived the final encounter.

The killer explained that he wanted the manuscript, and when Burleson claimed to have lost it, went wild and killed him in a fit of rage. There being nothing more to say, the story ended abruptly. The academics returned to their colleges, the dead were buried, and the guilty were punished.

IN MEMORIAM: DAVE DUNCAN (1933-2018)

At the grand opening of the new Central Library, I bumped into Cliff Samuels, long active in Calgary science fiction conventions and literary fandom. He mentioned the recent passing of Calgary's own pro SF author, Dave Duncan, who died on October 29 after suffering a brain hemorrhage due to a bad fall. Samuels had just received the manuscript of Duncan's latest book, his 60th novel.

I met and talked with Dave many times at Calgary conventions. He was a stalwart panelist, not only for fantasy and SF subjects but for scientific matters, as he had been a professional petroleum geologist. He was a gentleman and a scholar, well mannered and pleasant to know. He won two Aurora Awards during his literary career. The 1993 April issue of LOCUS had an extensive interview and biography about him.

Born in Scotland, Dave emigrated to Calgary in the 1950s as a young man and worked in the petroleum industry for decades. In 1983, after oil prices collapsed and thousands of geologists were made redundant, he started a second career that lasted as long as his first one, writing SF and fantasy novels. He was survived by his wife, three children, and four grandchildren.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor’s remarks in square brackets. Please include your name and town when sending a comment. Email to opuntia57@hotmail.com]

FROM: Lloyd Penney
Etobicoke, Ontario

2018-11-01

OPUNTIA 426: [Re: stone frigates] In Toronto, we did have the HMCS Haida, but it was eventually shipped down to Hamilton. There is HMCS York, but what sounds like a ship is actually a training building, close to the lake shore of Lake Ontario. There is a great aircraft museum in Hamilton, too.

[Re: message boards at train stations] We’ve got similar electronic screens in all subway stations here, but as with Calgary Transit, the freshness of the video announcements is suspect. There’s lots of changes on the bus system going on, too, and it is always difficult to keep up to date on any TTC changes.

My past loc: The Luminato Festival came and went, with little fanfare this time. Being at night also means few pictures. We now have four indoor shows to do before the end of the year, and there are already plans to look into anything coming up in early 2019.

OPUNTIA 427: [Re: ghost mall] We don’t have anything this bad, but there was a basement mall in the downtown area that failed miserably because they really were so far out of the way, not a single business wanted to set up in it. I am not sure what’s happened to it, if the floor area was redeveloped or not. There were 15 to 20 empty stores that stayed that way.

I have seen the scary versions of the Nestle Canada chocolates, and American friends think that this is the best, scAeros, Scaries and Coffin Crisps. No chocolate for me this season, and that’s okay. I don’t really need the extra calories.

[Read the chocolate article abstract (page 24) in this issue’s SEEN IN THE LITERATURE. I want to believe ...]

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Galvan, I., et al (2018) **Solar and terrestrial radiations explain continental-scale variation in bird pigmentation.** OECOLOGIA 188:683-693

Authors’ abstract: *Animals living on the earth’s surface are protected from the damaging effects of solar ultraviolet (UV) radiation by melanin pigments that color their integument. UV levels reach the earth’s surface vary spatially, but the role of UV exposure in shaping clinal [a cline is natural variation across the territory of a species] variations in animal pigmentation has never been tested.*

Here, we show at a continental scale in Europe that golden eagles Aquila chrysaetos reared in territories with a high solar UV-B radiation exposure deposit lower amounts of the sulphurated form of melanin (pheomelanin) in feathers and consequently develop darker plumage phenotypes than eagles from territories with lower radiation exposure.

This clinal variation in pigmentation is also explained by terrestrial gamma radiation levels in the rearing territories by a similar effect on the pheomelanin content of feathers, unveiling natural radioactivity as a previously unsuspected factor shaping animal pigmentation. These findings show for the first time the potential of solar and terrestrial radiations to explain pigmentation phenotype diversity in animals, including humans, at large spatial scales.

Quinn, T.P., et al (2018) **A multidecade experiment shows that fertilization by salmon carcasses enhanced tree growth in the riparian zone.** ECOLOGY 99:doi.org/10.1002/ecy.2453

Authors’ abstract: *As they return to spawn and die in their natal streams, anadromous, semelparous fishes such as Pacific salmon import marine-derived nutrients to otherwise nutrient-poor freshwater and riparian ecosystems. Diverse organisms exploit this resource, and previous studies have indicated that riparian tree growth may be enhanced by such marine-derived nutrients. However, these studies were largely inferential and did not account for all factors affecting tree growth.*

As an experimental test of the contribution of carcasses to tree growth, for 20 yr, we systematically deposited all sockeye salmon (Oncorhynchus nerka)

carcasses (217,055 individual salmon) in the riparian zone on one bank of a 2-km-long stream in southwestern Alaska, reducing carcass accumulation on one bank and enhancing it on the other. After accounting for partial consumption and movement of (*Picea glauca*) the dominant riparian tree species, for foliar nitrogen (N) content and stable isotope ratios (δN), and took core samples for annual growth increments.

Stable isotope analysis indicated that marine-derived N was incorporated into the new growth of the trees on the enhanced bank. Analysis of tree cores indicated that in the two decades prior to our enhancement experiment, trees on the south-facing (subsequently the depleted) bank grew faster than those on the north-facing (later enhanced) bank.

This difference was reduced significantly during the two decades of fertilization, indicating an effect of the carcass transfer experiment against the background of other factors affecting tree growth.

Boyce, M.S. (2018) **Wolves for Yellowstone: dynamics in time and space.** JOURNAL OF MAMMALOGY 99:1021-1031

[14 grey wolves from Alberta were relocated into Yellowstone National Park in 1995, seven decades after the native wolves had been deliberately exterminated from the park. Another 17 Alberta wolves were introduced the following year. Here is what happened.]

Author's abstract: *The reintroduction of gray wolves (Canis lupus) to Yellowstone National Park is the most celebrated ecological experiment in history. As predicted by population models, the rapid recovery of a wolf population caused both temporal and spatial variability in wolf-ungulate interactions that likewise generated temporal and spatial variation in the expression of trophic cascades.*

This has amplified spatial variation in vegetation in Yellowstone, particularly with willow (Salix spp.) and cottonwood (Populus spp.) in riparian areas, with associated changes in food webs. Increasing influences of grizzly bears (Ursus arctos), cougars (Puma concolor), and bison (Bison bison) are making what initially was predominantly an elk-wolf interaction into an increasingly complex system.

Outside Yellowstone, however, humans have a dominant influence in western North America that overwhelms trophic cascades resulting in what appear to be bottom-up influences on community structure and function. Complex and unexpected ecosystem responses to wolf recovery in Yellowstone reinforce the value of national parks and other protected areas as ecological baseline reserves.

[After the wolves were re-introduced, the elk population plummeted from 20,000 to 1,500. Natural vegetation such as willow and cottonwoods returned to their previous abundance, no longer being nibbled to stubs by elk. Bison herds have increased because they are no longer being outcompeted by elk.]

Owen, R.B., et al (2018) **Progressive aridification in East Africa over the last half million years and implications for human evolution.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:11174-11179

Authors' abstract: *Evidence for Quaternary climate change in East Africa has been derived from outcrops on land and lake cores and from marine dust, leaf wax, and pollen records. These data have previously been used to evaluate the impact of climate change on hominin evolution, but correlations have proved to be difficult, given poor data continuity and the great distances between marine cores and terrestrial basins where fossil evidence is located.*

Here, we present continental coring evidence for progressive aridification since about 575 thousand years before present (ka), based on Lake Magadi (Kenya) sediments. This long-term drying trend was interrupted by many wet-dry cycles, with the greatest variability developing during times of high eccentricity-modulated precession.

Intense aridification apparent in the Magadi record took place between 525 and 400 ka, with relatively persistent arid conditions after 350 ka and through to the present. Arid conditions in the Magadi Basin coincide with the Mid-Brunhes Event and overlap with mammalian extinctions in the South Kenya Rift between 500 and 400 ka. The 525 to 400 ka arid phase developed in the South Kenya Rift between the period when the last Acheulean tools are reported (at about 500 ka) and before the appearance of Middle Stone Age artifacts (by about 320 ka).

Our data suggest that increasing Middle- to Late-Pleistocene aridification and environmental variability may have been drivers in the physical and cultural evolution of Homo sapiens in East Africa.

Loughlin, N.J.D., et al (2018) **Ecological consequences of post-Columbian indigenous depopulation in the Andean-Amazonian corridor.** NATURE ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION 2:1233-1236

Authors' abstract: *European colonization of South America instigated a continental-scale depopulation of its indigenous peoples. The impact of depopulation on the tropical forests of South America varied across the continent. Furthermore, the role that indigenous peoples played in transforming the biodiverse tropical forests of the Andean-Amazonian corridor before AD 1492 remains unknown.*

Here, we reconstruct the past 1,000 years of changing human impact on the cloud forest of Ecuador at a key trade route, which connected the Inkan Empire to the peoples of Amazonia. We compare this historical landscape with the prehuman arrival (around 44,000-42,000 years ago) and modern environments.

We demonstrate that intensive land-use within the cloud forest before European arrival deforested the landscape to a greater extent than modern (post-AD 1950) cattle farming. Intensive indigenous land-use ended abruptly around AD 1588 following a catastrophic population decline. Forest succession then took around 130 years to establish a structurally intact forest, one comparable to that which occurred before the arrival of the first humans to the continent.

We show that nineteenth-century descriptions of the Andean-Amazonian corridor as a pristine wilderness record a shifted ecological baseline, one that less than 250 years earlier had consisted of a heavily managed and cultivated landscape.

Speirs: There is a myth that indigenous humans in the Americas lived in peace and harmony before the Europeans arrived and despoiled the land. In actual fact, studies have shown that ancient humans were just the same.

Strandberg, T.E., et al (2008) **Chocolate, well-being and health among elderly men.** EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF CLINICAL NUTRITION 62:247-253

Authors' abstract: *We have followed up a socio-economically homogenous group of men, born in 1919-1934, since the 1960s. In 2002-2003, a mailed questionnaire was used to assess the health and well-being (including questions related to positive life orientation, visual analogue scales and the Zung depression score) of survivors. In addition, candy preference was inquired. Those men who reported no candy consumption (n=108) were excluded from the analyses.*

The response rate was 69% (1367 of 1991). Of the respondents, 860 and 399 preferred chocolate and other type of candy, respectively. The average age in both candy groups was 76 years. Of the respondents, 99% were home-dwelling, 96% were retired and 87% were presently married, without differences between the candy groups.

Men preferring chocolate had lower body mass index and waist circumference, and they also reported more exercise and better subjective health (P=0.008) than other candy consumers. Variables related to psychological well-being were consistently better in those preferring chocolate. The differences were statistically significant in feeling of loneliness (P=0.01), feeling of happiness (P=0.01), having plans for the future (P=0.0002) and the Zung depression score (P=0.02).

Speirs: That's it. From now on, nothing but Dark Kit Kat bars and chocolate cupcakes for me. Seriously. This was an older paper I stumbled across while browsing for something else.

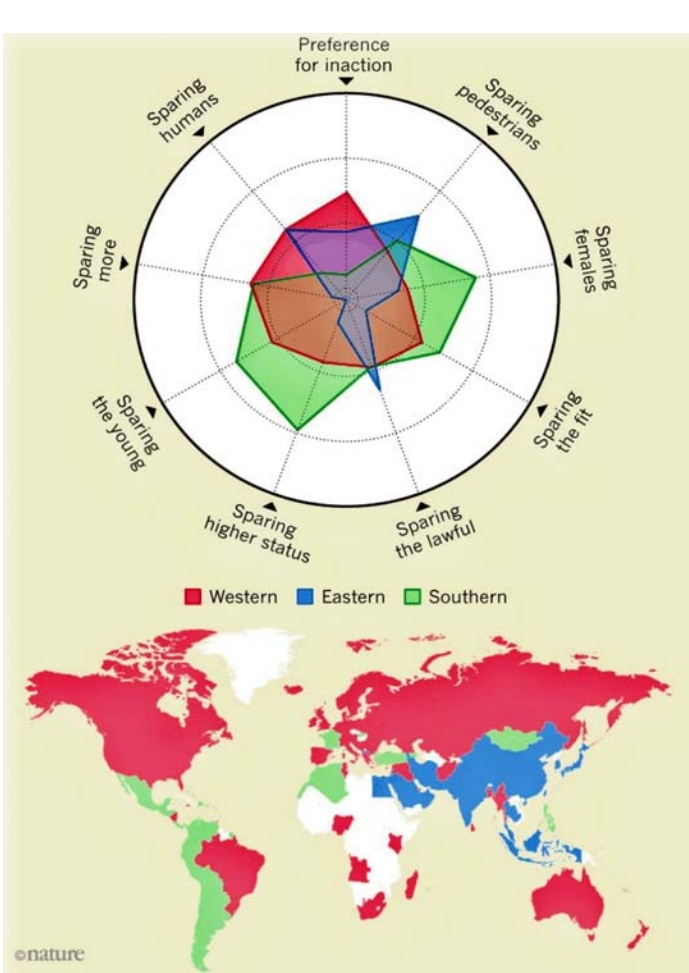
Awad, E., et al (2018) **The Moral Machine experiment.** NATURE doi.org/10.1038/s41486-018-0637-6

[Self-driving vehicles must be programmed to decide what to do in the event of a pedestrian emergency. If they swerve to avoid the pedestrian, they may kill others on the sidewalk. If there is no way to avoid it, they must decide whether to hit young humans or old ones. Trying to define the greatest good is not so easy when only a split-second is allowed. This paper studied priorities different cultures gave to a lose-lose situation where the vehicle cannot evade an impact.]

Authors' abstract: *With the rapid development of artificial intelligence have come concerns about how machines will make moral decisions, and the major challenge of quantifying societal expectations about the ethical principles that should guide machine behaviour.*

To address this challenge, we deployed the Moral Machine, an online experimental platform designed to explore the moral dilemmas faced by autonomous vehicles. This platform gathered 40 million decisions in ten languages from millions of people in 233 countries and territories.

Here we describe the results of this experiment. First, we summarize global moral preferences. Second, we document individual variations in preferences, based on respondents' demographics. Third, we report cross-cultural ethical variation, and uncover three major clusters of countries. Fourth, we show that these differences correlate with modern institutions and deep cultural traits.



We discuss how these preferences can contribute to developing global, socially acceptable principles for machine ethics. All data used in this article are publicly available.

[Graphic is from this article.]

Puente-Sánchez, F., et al (2018) **Viable cyanobacteria in the deep continental subsurface.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:10702-10707

Authors' abstract: *Cyanobacteria are ecologically versatile microorganisms inhabiting most environments, ranging from marine systems to arid deserts. Although they possess several pathways for light-independent energy generation, until now their ecological range appeared to be restricted to environments with at least occasional exposure to sunlight.*

Here we present molecular, microscopic, and metagenomic evidence that cyanobacteria predominate in deep subsurface rock samples from the Iberian Pyrite Belt Mars analog (southwestern Spain). Metagenomics showed the potential for a hydrogen-based lithoautotrophic cyanobacterial metabolism.

Collectively, our results suggest that they may play an important role as primary producers within the deep-Earth biosphere. Our description of this previously unknown ecological niche for cyanobacteria paves the way for models on their origin and evolution, as well as on their potential presence in current or primitive biospheres in other planetary bodies, and on the extant, primitive, and putative extraterrestrial biospheres.

Cyanobacteria were responsible for the origin of oxygenic photosynthesis, and have since come to colonize almost every environment on Earth. Here we show that their ecological range is not limited by the presence of sunlight, but also extends down to the deep terrestrial biosphere. We report the presence of microbial communities dominated by cyanobacteria in the continental subsurface using microscopy, metagenomics, and antibody microarrays.

These cyanobacteria were related to surface rock-dwelling lineages known for their high tolerance to environmental and nutritional stress. We discuss how these adaptations allow cyanobacteria to thrive in the dark underground, a lifestyle that might trace back to their nonphotosynthetic ancestors.

Whitewoods, C.D., et al (2018) **CLAVATA was a genetic novelty for the morphological innovation of 3D growth in land plants.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 28:2365-2376

Authors' abstract: *The conquest of land was enabled by a series of innovations that allowed plant forms to radiate and occupy new volumes of space in the sub-aerial environment. Among these, the innovation of shooting systems with organs positioned radially around an upright stem stands out as a primer for massively increased plant productivity and diversity. Such three-dimensional growth forms first arose as a consequence of a novel stem cell function gained by land plants, namely the capacity to rotate stem cell divisions through multiple plane orientations.*

The algal sister lineages of land plants are unable to rotate stem cell divisions through multiple planes and are therefore generally constrained to smaller filamentous or mat-like (two-dimensional) growth forms.

Unlike animal cells, plant cells are confined by rigid cell walls, and cell division plane orientation and growth rather than cell movement determine overall body form. The emergence of plants on land coincided with a new capacity to rotate stem cell divisions through multiple planes, and this enabled three-dimensional (3D) forms to arise from ancestral forms constrained to 2D growth.

The genes involved in this evolutionary innovation are largely unknown. The evolution of 3D growth is recapitulated during the development of modern mosses when leafy shoots arise from a filamentous (2D) precursor tissue. Here, we show that a conserved, CLAVATA peptide and receptor-like kinase pathway originated with land plants and orients stem cell division planes during the transition from 2D to 3D growth in a moss, Physcomitrella.

We find that this newly identified role for CLAVATA in regulating cell division plane orientation is shared between Physcomitrella and Arabidopsis. We report that roles for CLAVATA in regulating cell proliferation and cell fate are also shared and that CLAVATA-like peptides act via conserved receptor components in Physcomitrella. Our results suggest that CLAVATA was a genetic novelty enabling the morphological innovation of 3D growth in land plants.

Speirs: There are no underwater trees, and no marine algae that form trunks like trees. Some land plants moved back into freshwater, but they are derived, not part of the issue discussed in this paper. This is why the revolution took place

on land. It makes sense. In water, plants are supported by the buoyancy but when they grow up into the air, they must have support from all directions, hence trunks.

Hetherington, A.J., and L. Dolan (2018) **Stepwise and independent origins of roots among land plants.** NATURE 561:235-238

[Meristems are the tips of vascular (veined) plant stems and roots which generate new cells as the plant grows up or out, analogous to stem cells in animals.]

Authors' abstract: *Roots are one of the three fundamental organ systems of vascular plants, and have roles in anchorage, symbiosis, and nutrient and water uptake. However, the fragmentary nature of the fossil record obscures the origins of roots and makes it difficult to identify when the sole defining characteristic of extant roots, the presence of self-renewing structures called root meristems that are covered by a root cap at their apex, evolved.*

Here we report the discovery of what are, to our knowledge, the oldest meristems of rooting axes, found in the earliest-preserved terrestrial ecosystem (the 407-million-year-old Rhynie chert). These meristems, which belonged to the lycopsid Asteroxylon mackiei, lacked root caps and instead developed a continuous epidermis over the surface of the meristem. The rooting axes and meristems of A. mackiei are unique among vascular plants.

These data support the hypothesis that roots, as defined in extant vascular plants by the presence of a root cap, were a late innovation in the vascular lineage. Roots therefore acquired traits in a stepwise fashion. The relatively late origin in lycophytes of roots with caps is consistent with the hypothesis that roots evolved multiple times rather than having a single origin, and the extensive similarities between lycophyte and euphyllophyte roots therefore represent examples of convergent evolution. The key phylogenetic position of A. mackiei, with its transitional rooting organ, between early diverging land plants that lacked roots and derived plants that developed roots demonstrates how roots were 'assembled' during the course of plant evolution.